

PHL 314U-001: Computer Ethics (CRN: 65343)

Spring 2021, Online/Asynchronous

Dr. Colin Patrick: patrickc@pdx.edu

Office Hours: by appointment on Zoom (Zoom ID: 585-701-6377)

Course Description

This course examines the ethical and socio-political issues that arise in the context of the use of computing and digital technologies by individuals and institutions in the public and private sectors. Topics include privacy, surveillance, artificial intelligence, the impacts of contemporary communication and social media technologies on interpersonal skills, cognition, and mental health, and the role of social media in politics and social movements.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the people on whose land we are standing today, the Cowlitz, Chinook, Multnomah, and Clackamas Peoples. It is important to acknowledge the ancestors of this place and to recognize that we are here because of sacrifices they were forced to make. In remembering the Multnomah and Clackamas communities, we honor their memory, their lives, and their descendants. We also remember that we are guests of this land and must do our best to never forget its original inhabitants.

Learning Objectives

- Reflect ethically on the role of new technologies in society, applying ideas from class materials.
- Engage in civil discussion and collaborative learning with peers about class topics.
- Demonstrate learning through careful and critical writing and expression.
- Relate class themes to one's own personal and professional life and choices.
- Imagine possible futures and contemplate what is needed to bring them about.

Books

There are two books on order for the course:

- Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (Reprint Edition; Norton 2020)
- Turkle, Sherry. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (Penguin, 2018)

All other readings are available on D2L as PDF's or else online, linked below in the syllabus.

Grade Components (due dates/times for each are included in the schedule below)

Reading Response Posts ("RRP's")

Graded pass/fail; completion rate = 20% of course grade

Midterm Essay (3-4 pages, double spaced)

35% of course grade

Final

Part I (60% of Final Score): Essay (3-4 pages, double spaced) on students' choice of topic

Part II (40% of Final Score): Online exam on course content

Combined score on Parts I and II: 45% of course grade

Note: please refer to the “Basic Rules and Information” handout for more on the above assignments and grade components, and the grade calculation methodology. It is posted along with this syllabus on the course D2L site. *You are responsible for knowing the information on this handout, as well as the information on this syllabus.*

In addition to the above assignments and graded components, there will be an online discussion board on the course D2L site where students can raise questions, respond to them, start discussion threads, etc., and which I will be monitoring and contributing to periodically throughout the term. This is discussed further in the rules and information handout.

Please scroll to the end of this syllabus for student resources.

Schedule

WEEK 1: Mar 29 - Apr 2

Introducing Computer Ethics

- [Association of Computing Machinery \(ACM\) Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct](#)
- Geoffrey Fowler and Heather Kelly, [“Amazon’s New Health Band is the Most Invasive Tech We’ve Ever Tested”](#) (*Washington Post*, Dec 2020)
- EDRi and Access Now, [“Attention EU Regulators: We Need More than ‘AI Ethics’ to Keep Us Safe”](#)

RRP 1 due on D2L by the end of the day on Friday, April 2

(Note: all RRP’s listed below are due on D2L by the end of the day, i.e. 11:55pm, on the dates indicated)

WEEK 2: Apr 5 - 9

“An Ecosystem of Interruption Technologies”: Neuroplasticity and the Internet

- Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (Updated Edition, Norton 2020), Chapters 2-4

RRP 2 due Wednesday, April 7; RRP 3 due Friday, April 9

WEEK 3: Apr 12 - 16

“An Ecosystem of Interruption Technologies”: Neuroplasticity and the Internet

- Carr, *The Shallows*, Chapters 5-8

RRP 4 due Wednesday, April 14; RRP 5 due Friday, April 16

WEEK 4: Apr 19 - 23

Artificial Intelligence: Present and Future

- Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atla Mikkola Kjøsén, and James Steinhoff, “A Machine Can be Made to Simulate It” and Chapter 1: Means of Cognition, from *Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism* (Pluto, 2018) (PDF/D2L)
- Ray Kurzweil, “Robotics: Strong AI,” from *The Singularity is Near* (Viking, 2005) (PDF/D2L)
- Brian Christian, [“The Future of AI”](#) (YouTube)

RRP 6 due Wednesday, April 21; RRP 7 due Friday, April 23

WEEK 5: Apr 26 - 30

Artificial Intelligence: The Human Labor Behind the Machines

- Norman Geras, “Fetishism,” from *Literature of Revolution* (Reprint Edition, Verso, 2017) (PDF/D2L)
- Astra Taylor, [“The Automation Charade”](#) (*Logic*, Aug 2018)
- “Robots All the Way Down,” in [“Sylvia Federici in Conversation with Astra Taylor”](#) (*The Believer*, Jun 2019)
- Dyer-Witheford et al, “A Heptagon of Struggles,” from *Inhuman Power* (PDF/D2L)
- Jason Prado, [“Prospects for Organizing the Tech Industry”](#) (*Notes from Below*, Mar 2018)
- Timnit Gebru et al, [“The Fight for the Future: Organizing In and Around the Tech Industry”](#) (Roundtable discussion hosted by Haymarket Books, YouTube)

RRP 8 due Wednesday, April 28; RRP 9 due Friday, April 30
Midterm Essay Due to D2L by the end of the day Monday, May 3

WEEK 6: May 3 - 7

Privacy

- Rahul Sagar, "[Against Moral Absolutism: Surveillance and Disclosure After Snowden](#)" (*Ethics & International Affairs*, 2015)
- Carissa Véliz, "[Online Masquerade: Redesigning the Internet for Free Speech Through the Use of Pseudonyms](#)" (*Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 2019)
- Bobbie Johnson, "[Privacy no longer a social norm, says Facebook founder](#)" (*The Guardian*, Jan 2010)
- Sandra Matz, Ruth Elisabeth Appel, and Michal Kosinski, "[Rethinking privacy in the age of psychological targeting](#)" (LSE Blog, Nov 2019)
- Antoanetta Roussi, "[Resisting the rise of facial recognition](#)" (*Nature*, Nov 2020)
- Gabriele de Seta, "[Optical governance: The Roles of Machine Vision in China's Epidemic Response](#)" (*Strelka Mag*, Oct 2020)
- Glenn Greenwald, "[Why Privacy Matters](#)" (TED Talk)

RRP 10 due Wednesday, May 5; RRP 11 due Friday, May 7

WEEK 7: May 10 - 14

Smart Devices, Social Media, and Antisocial Behavior

- Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk In A Digital Age* (Penguin, 2018)

RRP 12 due Wednesday, May 12; RRP 13 due Friday, May 14

WEEK 8: May 17 - 21

Intellectual Property in the Internet Age

- Edwin Hettinger, "Justifying Intellectual Property," from *Business in Ethical Focus* (Broadview, 2018) (PDF/D2L)
- John Bohannon, "[Who's Downloading Pirated Papers? Everyone](#)" (*Science*, Apr 2016)
- Rainey Reitman and Jason Kelley, "[You Bought It, But Do You Own It?](#)" (EFF Podcast, Dec 2020)
- Jonathan Lethem, "[The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism](#)" (Harpers, Feb 2007)
- Kirby Ferguson, "[Everything is A Remix](#)" (YouTube)

RRP 14 due Wednesday, May 19; RRP 15 due Friday, May 21

WEEK 9: May 24 - 28

Surveillance, Policing, Drone Bombing

- Nick Turse, "[America's Secret Empire of Drone Bases](#)" (*The Nation*, Oct 2011)
- Jeremy Scahill and Glenn Greenwald, "[The NSA's Secret Role in the US Assassination Program](#)" (*The Intercept*, Feb 2014)
- Sidney Fussell, "[The Endless Aerial Surveillance of the Border](#)" (*The Atlantic*, Oct 2019)
- Tanvi Misra, "[What Border Security and Police Violence Have In Common](#)" (*Bloomberg*, Nov 2018)
- Shirin Ghaffary, "[The 'Smarter' Wall: How drones, sensors and AI are patrolling the border](#)" (*Vox*, Feb 2020)

RRP 16 due Friday, May 28

WEEK 10: May 31 - Jun 4

Digital Protest and Politics

- Candice Delmas, "[Is Hacktivism the New Civil Disobedience?](#)" (*Raisons Politiques*, 2018)
- Zeynep Tufekci, "[Twitter and Tear Gas: How Social Media Changed Protest Forever](#)" (*Wired*, May 2017)
- Misha Glenny, "[Hire the Hackers](#)" (TED Talk)
- Keren Elazari, "[Hackers: The Internet's Immune System](#)" (TED Talk)

RRP 17 due Friday, June 4

Final Part II (online exam on D2L) will be made available Friday, June 4

Final Part I (paper) is due Tuesday, June 8 at 11:55pm to D2L Dropbox

Final Part II (online exam on D2L) must be completed by Thursday, June 10 at 11:55pm

Student Resources

The College of Liberal Arts & Sciences has a useful list of [Student Resources during COVID-19](#), which I strongly encourage you to review. The [Multnomah County Community Resources page](#) also has links that you may find helpful.

This is a challenging period for everyone and the priority is that we take care of ourselves and the people close to us. I encourage you to reach out to me if you encounter any obstacles in your studies. I can connect you to PSU resources and provide flexibility in class assignments.

Access and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities

PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment.

If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, 503-725-4150, drc@pdx.edu, <https://www.pdx.edu/drc>.

- If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.
- Students who need accommodations for tests and quizzes are expected to schedule their tests to overlap with the time the class is taking the test.
- Please be aware that the accessible tables or chairs in the room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not useable.
- For information about emergency preparedness, please go to the [Fire and Life Safety webpage](#) for information.

Title IX Reporting Obligations

Portland State is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment (sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex-based harassment and stalking). If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or sexual harassment, know that help and support are available. PSU has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and on-housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. Information about PSU's support services on campus, including confidential services and reporting options, can be found on [PSU's Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website](#), or you may call a confidential IPV Advocate at 503-725-5672. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to either the [Office of Equity and Compliance](#) or the [Office of the Dean of Student Life](#).

Please be aware that all PSU faculty members and instructors are required to report information of an incident that may constitute prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. This means that if you tell me about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence that may have violated university policy or student code of conduct. I have to share the information with my supervisor, the University's Title IX Coordinator or the Office of the Dean of Student Life. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module [Creating a Safe Campus](#) in your D2L.

Cultural Resource Centers

The Cultural Resource Centers (CRCs) create a student-centered inclusive environment that enriches the university experience. We honor diversity, explore social justice issues, celebrate cultural traditions, and foster student identities, success, and leadership. Our centers include the Multicultural Student Center, La Casa Latina Student Center, Native American Student & Community Center, Pan African Commons, Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian American Student Center and the Middle Eastern, North African, South Asian program. We provide student leadership, employment, and volunteer opportunities; student resources such as computer labs, event, lounge and study spaces; and extensive programming. All are welcome!

For more information, get in touch with [Diversity and Multicultural Student Services](#).

Student Resources for Online and Remote Courses

Some of you may find these University-wide resources helpful.

- Online + Remote Readiness: A Skill Building Course - A free, self-paced course available to all students. This course will launch September 1st and will be automatically populated in all students' D2L course listings.
- <https://www.pdx.edu/learning-center/online-remote-learning-support> - An updated website including an Online Readiness Self-Assessment with resources for students.
- <https://www.pdx.edu/learning-center/academic-coaching> - Academic Coaching for all students (both undergrad and graduate students). The Learning Center had an increase in appointments in spring and summer as students adjusted to the new demands of the remote environment. We are doubling our coaching hours in fall term, as well as adding a FT professional academic coach so we can accommodate even more students. We will also have a STEM focused academic coach.
- D2L Support Drop-in Hours via Zoom - The Learning Center will host drop-in hours for D2L support (not content) for the first 2 weeks of the term

This page is also useful: [Student Resource Guide](#)

Help with Basic Needs (including Housing)

<https://www.pdx.edu/homelessness/find-help>

Basic Needs at Portland State

It can be challenging to do your best in class if you have trouble meeting basic needs like safe shelter, sleep, and nutrition. Resource centers across campus are here to provide assistance, referrals, and support. Please contact anyone on this list for assistance.

Basic Needs Hub

basicneedshub@pdx.edu

Portland State Food Pantry

psufp.com

pantry@pdx.edu

C.A.R.E. Team

askdos@pdx.edu

(503) 725-4422

[Racial Equity Support Line](#)

Telephone: 503-575-3764, M-F from 8:30 AM -5:00 PM.

The Racial Equity Support Line is a service led and staffed by people with lived experience of racism. We offer support to those who are feeling the emotional impacts of racist violence and microaggressions, as well as the emotional impacts of immigration struggles and other cross-cultural issues.